

REMARKS

Claims 8-14 are in this application and are presented for consideration. By this amendment, Applicant has canceled claims 1-7 in favor of the new claims.

Claims 1-4, 6 and 7 have been rejected as being anticipated by Starlipper (U.S. 1,151,131). Further, claims 1-7 have been rejected as being obvious based on Starlipper in view of Henegar (U.S. 1,332,626).

Applicant has now revised the claims to highlight the combination of features which have proved to be quite useful in practice and which differentiate over the various ring connection schemes of the prior art. Specifically, new independent claims 8-14 define a combination of features which are neither taught nor suggested by Starlipper, Henegar or the other reference including for example Osbourne (U.S. 1,288,973).

Applicant's independent claims highlight the combination of features in which the form of the structure of both joining devices 3 and 4, at the ends of the partial rings, are the same. Specifically, the shape of the structures are the same as well as the orientation. For example, one partial ring has the joining devices 3 and 4 at the upper side (with lower hook part) whereas the other has the joining devices at the lower side (when viewed in a connected state). This is neither taught nor suggested by several of the references including the primary reference Starlipper. Instead, Starlipper and several of the other references disclose an arrangement wherein an open type receiving hook structure is provided on one end and a protruding part is provided at the other end. These ends are not identical in shape or position (see Figure 3).

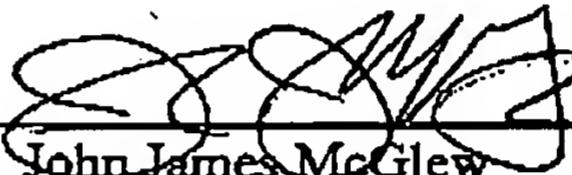
The invention additionally provides for the joining devices being arranged on each partial ring part first at the outer side or outer edge and second at the inner side or inner edge of the partial rings. This is different from the structures of the prior art including for example Henegar in which a protruding and receiving part are provided located centrally. Starlipper also has a generally centrally located protruding part and receiving part. With Osbourne the protruding part is always at the inner side or always at the outer side.

According to the invention, one partial ring is arranged at the radial outer side of the end face or end of the ring and the other end of the ring has the joining device arranged on the inner side. With this construction all of the rings are identical. This feature is particularly advantageous with regard to manufacture and is a feature which is not present in any one of Starlipper, Osbourse and Henegar. Further, the prior art as a whole fails to teach and fails to suggest the combination of features claimed. In Osbourne, for example, the partial rings are not identical and at one ring both joining devices 4 are arranged at the inner side of the end face of the ring 2 whereas both joining devices 5 of the half ring 3 are arranged at the outer side of the end face.

The combination of features claimed is clearly neither taught nor suggested by the prior art as a whole. Further, the arrangement has significant advantages with regard to manufacturing (identical parts with substantially identical joining structures). The prior art in each case presents structures which are different from the combination of features claimed. Further Applicant's structure provides a very effective connection (see particular claim 14) and the structure can be manufactured in a relatively straight forward manner, particularly based on the identical nature of each of the partial rings.

Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner favorable consider the claims as now presented.

Respectfully submitted
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